

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE PILGRIMAGE

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Keywords: Christian pilgrimage, Promised Land, celebration, blessing, revelation.

ABSTRACT. This paper aims to highlight some aspects concerning the phenomenon of religious pilgrimage, insisting on some biblical foundations of the pilgrimage phenomenon, as well as, in a theological approach, on its motivations and significance in Christianity. Religious pilgrimage centres on the desire to experience the encounter with God. Going on pilgrimage is an answer to this inner call: the pilgrim begins his journey with the awareness of being called by God. Some events and persons in the history of Israel anticipate and symbolize aspects and features of religious pilgrimage. The entire journey of the people of Israel through the desert was a pilgrimage made with the hope of reaching the Promised Land. Although during a pilgrimage may occur moments of wandering, difficulties, attempts and sometimes even desperation (events that can be also found in the pilgrimage of the chosen people), the experience of the pilgrimage is a celebration that profoundly marks the personality and spirituality of pilgrims.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many cultures and religions, the pilgrimage represent an initiatory trip, and it was defined through the ritual achieved at the end of the trip. In contrast to other trips with spiritual, cultural or devotional purpose, the pilgrimages of Christians from early Church were based, initially, on the Hebrew and biblical tradition. The visit to Jerusalem and to other holy sites in Israel represent the cultural and historical foundation of the Christian pilgrimage. Subsequently, the manifestation forms, the significations and the pilgrimage destinations have diversified, according to the new historical-socio-cultural realities.

2. THE PILGRIMAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Patriarch Abraham can be considered the first pilgrim in the history of the chosen people: from the exit of his country and house, during his whole life he was looking for a more profoundly contact with God, which was revealed to him, thus making him the bearer of the promise of salvation.

God is the initiator of the call of Abraham, and the commandment of God is accompanied by the promise of blessing. Abraham leads a nomadic or peregrine existence and his destination is established by God Himself: "Now the Lord said to Abraham: «Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you! And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great; so that you will be a blessing» (*Gen 12:1-2*). Abram went, as the Lord had told him. And Lot went with him. (...) They set out to go to the land of Canaan and they came to the land of Canaan (*Gen 12:4-5*). After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. (...) He also said to him: «I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it»" (*Gen 15:1-7*).

The tribe of Abraham, like other families or tribes at the time, led a nomadic life, of pilgrimage, living from the flocks that were moved from one place to another, in search of food and water sources. The theological interpretation of the biblical text concerning the historical-cultural aspects of nomadic existence of Abraham insists on the motivation of this pilgrimage: the moving of Patriarch Abraham and of his tribe is not motivated by the need to seek the resources of their own subsistence, but by the desire to fulfil the will of God and His plan of transcendental love towards people: the people's entrance in a new land, more fruitful, blessed. The exit of his own

country and his departure for an unknown destination, chosen and indicated by God, it is the desirable response from any Christian who intends to faithfully and coherently fulfil the Lord's will.

The preparation for the departure on pilgrimage include the attending of some purification stages (of the body and the soul): "Then God said to Jacob: «Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau!» So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him: «Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone»" (*Gen 35:1-3*).

In the Old Testament, the search of the meaning that each human has in his life, the overcoming of a crisis situation or the taking of an important decision it was preceded by a consultation of the will of God, which consist of a question asked to Yahweh, through a priest or a prophet: "And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said: «Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin?» And the Lord said: «Judah shall go up first!»" (*Jud 20:18*). And the children of Israel enquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, and Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days), saying: «Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother, or shall I cease?» And the Lord said: «Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand!»" (*Jud 20, 27-28*).

The biblical stories about journeys are dominated by the hoping to reach the desired destination, but often also include a request made with the hope to get a spiritual good, an answer, a solving of a problem, or a particular good (a healing). The pilgrimage involves the manifestation of hope in God, based on His promise and fidelity. "Then Jacob made a vow, saying: «If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear, so that I return safely to my father's household, then the Lord will be my God. And this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth»" (*Gen 28:20-22*).

In the holy place, at the destination of the pilgrimage, in the sanctuary, occurs *theophany*: there, the believer meets up with God: "Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem. (...) The Lord appeared to Abram and said: «To your offspring I will give this land». So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him" (*Gen 12:6-7*).

A shrine worshiped by the tribe of Abraham, and then in the Hebrew, Christian and Muslim traditions is Mambre, located 3 km north of Hebron: "Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mambre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord" (*Gen 13:18*). Abraham - the pilgrim temporarily settled in Canaan - becomes the host for God - The Pilgrim. In the three pilgrims from the Mambre, Christian tradition has contemplated the mysterious presence of three celestial beings (three angels or the Holy Trinity): "The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mambre, while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent, in the heat of the day" (*Gen 18:1*).

Beersheba ("Well of The Oath"), situated to the south of Hebron, becomes a pilgrimage place in the time of Abraham: "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God" (*Gen 21:33*). To Beersheba go as a pilgrim also Isaac: "From there he went up to Beersheba. That night the Lord appeared to him and said: «I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham». Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well" (*Gen 26:23-25*).

Jacob meets God at Bethel: "Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. (...) He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: «I am the Lord, the God

of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. (...) I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.» When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought: «Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it!» He was afraid and said: «How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!»” (*Gen* 28:10-17).

The purpose of the pilgrimage is the encounter with God: after forty days and forty nights spent on the way to Horeb (Mount of God), the prophet Elijah discovered God in a deep silence: “Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him: «Get up and eat!» He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again. Then the angel of the Lord came again and touched him and said: «Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you!» So he got up and ate and drank; and the food¹ gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God. There he came to a cave, where he spent the night. The Lord Speaks to Elijah. But the Lord said to him: «What are you doing here, Elijah?» Elijah replied: «I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.» «Go out and stand before me on the mountain», the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And a voice said, «What are you doing here, Elijah?»” (*1 Kgs* 19:5-13).

The return to the country represents the end of a journey: the country represents the origin, the foundation, the destination of any human existence, it is the place of their roots, where is his family, relatives and friends. In this sense, the pilgrimage involves the searching of the origins, an exodus, in order to find their own country and identity. Therefore, the pilgrimage generates a powerful generator force: like any return to the origins, it symbolizes the renewal, the rebirth. “Then the Lord said to Jacob: «Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.»” (*Gen* 31:3). «I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made your vow to me. Now arise and leave this country and return to the land of your birth.»” (*Gen* 31:13).

The pilgrimage's Psalms (Psalms 118-134) insists on hope, emotion and joy that animate the pilgrims in this way: “I rejoiced with those who said to me: «Let us go to the house of the Lord!» Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem!” (*Ps* 122:1-2). The welcoming of pilgrims in the temple is accompanied by the priests' blessing: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.” (*Ps* 118:26).

After the unification of tribes under King David, the destination of pilgrimages was Jerusalem, for all the Jewish tribes, as well as, in the prophetic visionary perspective, for all peoples of the earth: “The nations will see your justice, and all kings your glory” (*Is* 62:2).

Thus, even from the Old Testament, Jerusalem was considered the world centre of monotheism, as well as a blessed place of God's presence on earth: “In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many people will come and say, «Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.»” (*Is* 2:2-3).

Mount Zion is the throne of the Lord and the Bible verses affirm His sovereignty over all nations: “In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the

¹ It was assumed that, during the whole trip, Elijah would be fasted as he did Moses. The Church sees in this food the symbol of the Eucharistic bread, which gives strength to human during the earthly pilgrimage (*Biblia*, Ed. Sapientia, Iași 2013, 664).

mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, «Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.» The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (*Mih* 4:1-2).

In these verses it makes references to the pilgrimages toward Jerusalem, conducted during the major feasts: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed. Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you.” (*Dt* 16:16-17).

According to the Law, after reaching the age of twelve, every Israelite male was obliged to go on pilgrimage to the Temple, three times a year, during the three great Jewish feasts of pilgrimage²: the *Passover* (Feast of Unleavened Bread; the feast of unleavened bread has their origins in a rural feast, celebrated at the beginning of the barley harvest, and represent a rite of renewal and beginning; on this occasion they eat only bread, made just of the new harvest; the people of Israel adopted this celebration after the entering in Canaan, and he gave a new meaning, by reporting it to the exit from Egypt); the *Pentecost* (Feast of Weeks, or of the harvest; this holiday was celebrated after seven weeks³, or in the 50th day after Easter⁴, and originally meant the end of wheat harvest, and later is added the remembrance of the promulgation of the Law on Mt. Sinai); the *Feast of Tabernacles* (or the autumn harvest; it was celebrated for one week, in September-October, and the specifics of the feast was the construction of some tents / huts of palm branches, in which the Jews lived throughout the feast, in memory of the passage of them ancestors through the wilderness; the feast was also characterized by the ceremony of water, and the celebration of light). “Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Aviv, for in that month you came out of Egypt. No one is to appear before me empty-handed. Celebrate the Festival of Harvest with the first fruits of the crops you sow in your field. Celebrate the Festival of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord.” (*Ex* 23, 14-17).

Those who lived far away were obliged to go to the Temple only on Easter and the women were not required (although many women were walking, in godliness). Along with the obligation to go to the sanctuaries established and to provide certain offerings / sacrifices, during these celebrations was provided the general prohibition to work: “shall do no servile work” (cf. *Lev* 23:7.21.25.31.35). These feasts were celebrated on fixed dates and on established places, and during this celebrations were achieved the encounter between God and his people: “And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory” (*Ex* 29:43). After the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the binding place of celebrating these feasts will be established Jerusalem⁵. “The king gave this order to all the people: «Celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.» Neither in the days of the judges

² These feasts were called *pilgrimages* because were celebrated in a unique place or sanctuary, toward which were going people coming from their countries of origin.

³ “Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to the Lord your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the Lord your God has given you!” (*Dt* 16:9-10).

⁴ “From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord!” (*Lev* 23, 15-16).

⁵ During the installation of Jews to Palestine, they underwent the Canaanites influences of religious practices, so that they offered to God them sacrifices on the same high places. During Solomon they had not yet fully conscience of danger that represent for the Israel's faith the syncretism which reigned over these high places (there is an ambiguity concerning the person and the nature of deity adored on these high places). Starting with Hezekiah (2 *Kgs* 18:4), and especially with Josiah (son of Amon, king of Judea) in 622 BC, it was banned the practice of offering sacrifices on the high places. Josiah has tried to disband all local sanctuaries, the majority dedicated to the idols (2 *Kgs* 23:4-19) so that all the religious rituals should have celebrated at the Temple in Jerusalem.

who led Israel nor in the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah had any such Passover been observed. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem.” (2 Kgs 23:21-23).

References to ritualistic pilgrimages of the Old Testament are also included in the following verses: “Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up — the tribes of the Lord — to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. There stand the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David” (Ps 122:3-5). In the future, all the nations will take part in this pilgrimage toward Jerusalem, dressed in splendour: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. (...) And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord. (...) and I will adorn my glorious temple.” (Is 60:1-7).

The pilgrimage of all peoples to the holy city of Jerusalem is prophesied also in the eschatological discourse of the prophet Isaiah: “And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them, and I will send some of those who survive to the nations (...), and to the distant islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations. And they will bring all your people, from all the nations, to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord — on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels, says the Lord. They will bring them, as the Israelites bring their grain offerings, to the temple of the Lord in ceremonially clean vessels. (...) From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord.” (Is 66:18-23).

The salvation of the people is not conditioned by the belonging to the Hebrew people, but by the fidelity to the teaching of God: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: «Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say: ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going’. And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him.»” (Zec 8:20-22).

The obligation of annual pilgrimage for the people who came from paganism was maintained only for the Feast of Tabernacles: “Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. If any of the peoples of the earth do not go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. If the Egyptian people do not go up and take part, they will have no rain. The Lord will bring on them the plague he inflicts on the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles. This will be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles.” (Zec 14:16-19).

Moses asked to the Pharaoh the permission to go into the wilderness, together with his people, to celebrate a feast to the Lord⁶: “(...) Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword.” (Ex 5:3). Subsequently of disasters that struck the Egypt (“the ten plagues”, cf. Ex. 7:14 – 12, 29), “During

⁶ “The indication of this cult in the desert (cf. Ex 3:18) will return as a refrain in the narration of the first nine plagues, except the third and the sixth (cf. Ex 7:16.26; 8:4.16.23; 9:1.13; 10:3.24). In all probability, this celebration is the Easter (cf. Ex 12:1). The pilgrimages are celebrations of the community, celebrated at a fixed date, in a holy places. Here, the place is Sinai, where God of the Exodus revealed to Moses; the time is on the spring, when the shepherds were offering a sacrifice, in order to invoke the protection of the flock before turning to the pasture” (*Biblia*, Ed. Sapientia, Iași 2013, 143).

the night, Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said: «Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me!» (Ex 12:31).

The way of people of Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan, recounted in fascinating and also dramatic episodes in the Book of Exodus, in Leviticus, in Numbers and in the Book of Deuteronomy, it is a symbol of the pilgrimage. It begins with the exodus from Egypt (Ex 13:17) and ends “to your holy dwelling” (Ex 15:13): “The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children” (Ex 12:37) toward “the mountain of your inheritance — the place, Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.” (Ex 15:17). Paradoxically, in this itinerary through the desert (a place par excellence of insecurity, dangers, threats and even death), the people of Israel experiences the gratuitousness of life and enjoy by the care of God: “The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.” (Ex 16:35).

Entering in “the land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 33:3) it is performed however after crossing the wilderness, during forty years. None of those released from Egypt will not enter into the Promised Land, not even Moses, who will see it only from afar: “Then the Lord said to him: «This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said: ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.»” (Dt 34:4).

The prolonged wanderings of the chosen people through the desert serves to a progressive purification: in the Promised Land, the people of Israel arrive released and conscious of his own identity and dignity (cf. Jos 24:1-28). The chosen people left the country of slavery, of serving the Pharaoh, in order to enter into the land of freedom - but not to get an anarchic liberty, but a service to God, a freedom governed by the Law of Alliance. “So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem. And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. And Joshua said to all the people, «Behold, this stone shall be a witness against us, for it has heard all the words of the Lord that he spoke to us. Therefore it shall be a witness against you, lest you deal falsely with your God.»” (Jos 24:25-27).

The same awareness of their own identity and of the divine protection is discovered, once again, at the return to the country of the people of Israel, after the suffering endured in the Babylonian exile: “«The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob!» They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock; he split the rock and the water gushed out!” (Is 48:20-21); “Thus says the Lord: «In a time of favour I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, ‘Come out,’ to those who are in darkness, ‘Appear.’ They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. And I will make all my mountains a road, and my highways shall be raised up. Behold, these shall come from afar, and behold, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene.» Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted!” (Is 49: 8-13).

The release from suffering and the return to the Promised Land represents the end of a purifier pilgrimage, developed under the protection of God: “Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the Lord. For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight, for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” (Is 52:11-12).

During the Judges there were numerous holy places toward which walked on pilgrimage the people of Israel: Mount Ebal (“At that time Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal”; Jos 8:30); Bochim (“And they called the name of that place Bochim. And they sacrificed there to the Lord”; Judh 2:5); Bethel (“Then all the people of Israel, the whole army,

went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord.” *Judh* 20:26).

During the period of Kings, the Mount Carmel is mentioned also as a pilgrimage place, where the prophet Elijah confronted the priests of Baal⁷: “So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.” (*1 Kgs* 18:20).

In the Old Testament there are also numerous warnings about the dangers that may threaten the true faith in God, due to the forfeiture of the religion in a shallow form of pilgrimage's ritual practices, through a formal manifestation, sterile and devoid of personal experience of the religious cult. “For thus says the Lord to the house of Israel: «Seek me and live; but do not seek Bethel, and do not enter into Gilgal or cross over to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into exile, and Bethel shall come to nothing.» (*Am* 5:4-5); Though you play the whore⁸, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, and swear not, «As the Lord lives.» (*Hos* 4:15); But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together; they murder on the way to Shechem; they commit villainy. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled (*Hos* 6:7-10); Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they have become to him altars for sinning (*Hos* 8: 11); Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.” (*Hos* 10: 2).

The foundation of any religious attitudes of fidelity to God's will is a conscious, genuine and responsible faith, of conversion and true search for God. “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to him, «Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God’, to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.» I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.” (*Hos* 14:1-7).

In conclusion it can be stated that the essence of the teachings of the Law concerning the pilgrimages of the people of Israel was contained in the Book of Exodus and also in the Deuteronomy (cf. *Ex* 23:14-17; 34:18.22-26; *Dt* 16:1-17). “In the biblical consciousness and in the Hebrew calendar, the pilgrimage feasts proposes, at a liturgical and ritual level, the road of Israel as an exodus road or a Peregrine one. In fact from the three celebrations, the Feast of Unleavened Bread or the Lord's Passover reminds the beginning of the road, with the liberation from Egypt; the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost reminds the alliance with God in desert, on Mount Sinai; the Feast of tents or the Feast of Tabernacles reminds the entrance to the Promised Land. All this expresses an important metaphor of the existence of Israel - and also of human existence, represented by Israel - as a nomadic or peregrine existence.” [1].

3. THE PILGRIMAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament it can be found numerous traits of Jewish tradition, but in a transformed and renewed ritualistic atmosphere. Thus, the realities related to the practice of pilgrimage become relative, especially with regard to the ritualistic manifestations. At the same time, there is observed an ever deeper theological substantiation of religious pilgrimage. “For the People of God, the Temple was to be the place of their education in prayer: pilgrimages, feasts and

⁷ The place of confrontation between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of foreign gods is also known as El-Muhraqa (“the place of the burnt offering”); before, on this place was as a shrine consecrated to God, particularly venerated, but which was destroyed by Queen Jezebel: “Then Elijah (...) repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob (...). With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord (...).” (*1 Kgs* 18:30).

⁸ The prophets understand debauchery metaphorically, ie infidelity to God (cf. *Hos* 6:10; 9:1).

sacrifices, the evening offering, the incense, and the bread of the Presence («shewbread») - all these signs of the holiness and glory of God Most High and Most Near were appeals to and ways of prayer. But ritualism often encouraged an excessively external worship. The people needed education in faith and conversion of heart; this was the mission of the prophets, both before and after the Exile.” [2].

The dynamic connection between the human response to God's call and the pilgrimage toward the promised place is the faith. Thus explains Apostle Paul the pilgrimage of Abraham from Chaldea to Canaan: “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.” (*Heb 11:8-10*).

Saint Apostle Paul insists on faith and hope, the cardinal virtues that we must cultivate in our fleeting life, peregrine on this earth: “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.” (*Heb 11:13-16*).

The virtue of faith in God is also the foundation of Moses's pilgrimage: “By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them. By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.” (*Heb 11:27-29*).

In the New Testament, the pilgrimage acquire news meanings. The redeeming Incarnation of the Son reveals that the meeting between human and God is rooted in the free gift of God to mankind. God comes to meet the human and He manifests his presence in the human history: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (*Jn 1:14*).

Usually, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the feasts of pilgrimage represents some collective events: “Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances.” (*Lk 2:41-44*).

The first pilgrims that evokes the New Testament writings are: Mary, on the visit made to Elizabeth and then traveling with Joseph to Bethlehem; the Magi and the shepherds arrived to adore the Child born in the manger; Mary and Joseph, celebrating the presentation of Jesus in the Temple and then the escape to Egypt, as a symbolic reliving of the Exodus; Jesus, often presented in a pilgrim situation, starting with the episode presented in the Gospel of Luke (*Lk 2:41-52*) – the loss and the finding of Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem, at the age of twelve: “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” (*Lk 2:49*).

The road becomes the symbol of the passage of Jesus among people. The public life of Jesus is presented in the biblical writings as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where He will fulfil his mission: “(...) who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (*Lk 9:31*); When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem (*Lk 9:51*); But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem (*Lk 9:53*); He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem (*Lk 13:22*); On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee (*Lk 17:11*); And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.” (*Lk 19:28*).

During his public activity, Jesus will participate in traditional Jewish pilgrimages, but the Jerusalem which pursues the pilgrim Jesus is not the fortress of the ancient Temple, but the city of the New Easter, the place where we will celebrate the mystery of death and that of His Resurrection, through which consummates His Incarnation and the human's salvation plan [3]: "Like the prophets before him Jesus expressed the deepest respect for the Temple in Jerusalem. It was in the Temple that Joseph and Mary presented him forty days after his birth. (*Lk* 2:22-39) At the age of twelve he decided to remain in the Temple to remind his parents that he must be about his Father's business. (Cf. *Lk* 2:46-49). He went there each year during his hidden life at least for Passover. (Cf. *Lk* 2:41) His public ministry itself was patterned by his pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the great Jewish feasts." [cf. *Jn* 2:13-14; 5:1,14; 7:1,10,14; 8:2; 10:22-23].

Jesus used the pilgrimage as an instrument for revelation of His mission: "But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, «Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.» For even his own brothers did not believe in him. Therefore Jesus told them, «My time is not yet here; for you any time will do. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil. You go to the festival. I am not going up to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come.» After he had said this, he stayed in Galilee. However, after his brothers had left for the festival, he went also, not publicly, but in secret. (...) Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach." (*Jn* 7:2-14).

The pilgrimage of Jesus was accomplished through the mystery of the Cross: "(...) but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' " (*Jn* 16:5). "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." (*Jn* 16:28).

"The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father" [4]. The pilgrim Church is also missionary, according to the mandate from Christ: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (*Mt* 28:19-20). The food and the spiritual richness on the Church' pilgrimage are the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Word of God: "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." (*Heb* 13:14)

The peregrinating people of God "marching along the narrow way of the Cross" [5]: "Already the final age of the world has come upon us (cf. *1 Cor* 10:11.) and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way; for the Church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect. However, until there shall be new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells (cf. *2 Pt* 3:13.) the pilgrim Church in her sacraments and institutions, which pertain to this present time, has the appearance of this world which is passing and she herself dwells among creatures who groan and travail in pain until now and await the revelation of the sons of God (cf. *Rom* 8:19-22). (...) Until the Lord shall come in His majesty, and all the angels with Him (cf. *Mt* 25:31) and death being destroyed, all things are subject to Him, (cf. *Eph* 4:1-6) some of His disciples are exiles on earth, some having died are purified, and others are in glory beholding «clearly God Himself triune and one, as He is.» [6].

The pilgrimage achieved in a communautaire way (understood as a journey made together, or a meeting at a sanctuary) represent a private experience of communication and spiritual community sharing: "I was glad when they said to me: «Let us go to the house of the Lord!» (...) For my brothers and companions' sake, I will say: «Peace be within you!» For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your good" (*Pss* 122, 1.8-9). Although during a pilgrimage it may occur some moments of wandering, of difficulties, of attempts and sometimes even of desperation, the experience of pilgrimage represents a feast, which marks deeply the personality and spirituality of pilgrims, as well as the interpersonal relationships.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The pilgrimage is one of the oldest religious acts in the human history. It is not a mere expression of manifestation of faith, but a meaningful search of God, which involves the Christian desire to lead a holiness life. The pilgrimage is integrated into the life of the Church as a particular form of personal piety, sometimes communautaire. Into the ecclesial tradition, pilgrimage is a journey which has as destination a holy place, and it aims to celebrate a religious event or to honour the witness of faith of some saints. The ultimate goal of a pilgrimage must be the pilgrim's spiritual enrichment, the profound conversion of his own life, the improvement of relations between human and God and also between people.

References

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- [2] *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice de București, București, 1993, 2581
- [3] *Idem*, 583.
- [4] Decree *Ad gentes*, on the mission activity of the Church, 2.
- [5] *Idem*, 1.
- [6] Dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48-49.